2. Background

THIS chapter deals with an outline-survey of the background of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. A detailed account of the different factors that shaped the outlook of Gandhi and helped the process of the making of the Mahatma may itself be a subject for separate study and investigation. The evolution of the political philosophy of Gandhi has to be viewed, as has been suggested earlier, in the background of the evolution of his dynamic personality and the development of the Indian national movement. While recognizing the importance of such a comprehensive study, we limit ourselves to a broad outline-discussion of the origin and development of his ideas.

It is in the nature of the truly great man to acknowledge the sources of his greatness. Gandhi's *Autobiography* testifies that the great Gandhi did so without any reservation. This adds to his stature as a man of truth. The family in which he was born, the society that he confronted, the cultural values and traditional norms that he inherited—all these factors left their impress on the mind of Gandhi. He was deeply rooted in the traditional milieu of India. But he was no traditionalist; he knew the little-known art of outstepping the boundaries of tradition while being rooted in tradition. If he were a traditionalist in the accepted sense of the term then it would not have been possible for him to create new values which he did significantly. Gandhi was not merely a child of his family or of the country in which he was born—he grew to be "a child of one world".[1] Born in India, he studied in

England, made his debut in South Africa, and came back to India only to instil faith and energy into the semi-paralysed people of India and lead millions of his countrymen against the octopus of foreign imperialist exploitation that strangled the life and growth of India. He came into contact with Christians, and without being converted a Christian, he assimilated the messsage of love that Jesus preached. He encountered Western civilization : condemned it and, at the same time, drew the life and energy of his movement from Western sources. The economic organization of society that he witnessed evoked his passionate opposition and he set himself the task of formulating economic principles and methods based on his fundamental beliefs. The mode of operation of the Indian political movement led by the upper classes stirred him into thinking in a new direction which culminated in a new technique—a technique of mass participation in public affairs.

Gandhi's social and political philosophy was grounded on certain fundamental postulates. He brought a new message, or, to be more accurate, restated the old truths. But it was his singular credit that he adapted a technique considered valid in individual spiritual and religious life to the secular and collective sphere of human life. Let us pass on to consider, in as brief a manner as possible, as to how the tradition and situational condition etc. contributed to the development of his ideas.

Family Background

Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* : "Children inherit the qualities of the parents. no less than their physical features. Environment does play an important part, but the original capital on which a child starts in life is inherited from its ancestors."

His ancestors were of the *Vaiśya* trading class—the third of the four castes in Hinduism. But, for two generations, since his grandfather's, they had been Prime Ministers in several Kathiawad states. Both his grandfather and father were

reputed for rectitude, integrity and honesty. The Gandhi family was non-conformist professionally, though they followed the traditional theistic faith, called Vaiṣṇavism. Kathiawad, moreover, was the centre of the Vaiṣṇava sect founded by Vallabhācārya. This sect is distinguished by a rather effusive devotion, like that of Caitanya. Hinduism in this region was also influenced by Jainism which was strong in Gujarat. There was another current of thought in Northern Vaiṣṇavism, deriving from Rāmānanda and the sects founded by his followers. This tradition, owing, it is believed, to contact with Islam, was always more popular, more protestant, ascetic and liberal. The religion which Gandhi professed in his later life was closer perhaps to this tradition than to any other. He referred constantly to the saints of this school. The religious expression of Vaiṣṇavism is in love and adoration, and it implies a belief in the Supreme Person rather than in a Supreme Abstraction. Devotion and self-surrender are the keynotes of this faith. Gandhi was born and raised in such an atmosphere. His mother was devoutly religious. She left an outstanding impress of her saintliness on the memory of Gandhi. His *Autobiography* records this memory and also that of his devout nurse, Rambhā. He told Vincent Sheean only a few days before his death: "I owe them (Gandhi's disciplinary resolutions) first of all to my saintly mother and to my good nurse. These were noble women. They taught me to tell the truth and not to fear."[2]

When he was seven years old, the family left Porbandar for Rajkot where almost his whole youth was spent. He came across religious books in Gujarati—Tulsidas' *Rāmāyaṇa*, The *Bhāgavata*, the *Manusmṛti*. Gandhi's faith in the equality of religions was derived from the discussions his father used to have had with his Muslim, Parsi and Jain friends. But in spite of an abundance of Christian literature, missionaries and churches in India, Christianity failed to attract young Gandhi. "Only Christianity was at the time an exception. I developed a dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near

the high school and hold forth pouring abuses on Hindus and their gods."

Being raised in such an atmosphere, religious questions occupied his attention very early. He had often to go to the *Hāvelī* and observe other religious practices, though at that period he had no living faith in God. But as he himself recorded in his *Autobiography* : "But one thing took deep root in me—the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening." To quote him again : "the passion for truth was innate in me." The philosophy of non-violence that he expounded and practised in his later life, he learnt at this period. The precept of returning good for evil became his guiding principle. The passages of a Gujarati didactic stanza * gripped his mind and heart. The play *Hariścandra* that he saw in his early childhood was vivid in his memory. The truthfulness of *Hariścandra* captured his heart and he derived therefrom his inspiration for the practice of honesty. The stories of Dhruva and Prahlāda also moved him deeply. For all of them had shown exemplary adherence to truth, and had also suffered in consequence.

Gandhi displayed some reforming tendencies even in his early years. At the age of twelve he argued with his mother that to observe untouchability in relation to the family sweeper was not right and could not be sanctioned by the scriptures, though he was always scrupulous to obey his mother and perform the necessary ablutions. Similarly, in his early teens, he took meat several times, though at first with disgust, and did not disapprove of doing so on religious grounds. The fear of being

*For a bowl of water give a goodly meal ;
For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal ;
For a simple penny pay thou back with gold ;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard ;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But the truly noble know all men as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done.

outcast from his community could not deter him from crossing the ocean to study in England. This was indeed an early glimmering of an independent strain of mind that he showed later in different phases of his life.

Gandhi showed in his later life an unwavering zeal in following the path of duty, as he conceived it, in the face of almost universal disagreement. This trait owes its origin to his passion for truth. But equally characteristic was his sensitiveness to the feeling of others and to, what may be called, the psychological atmosphere, his eagerness to compromise on inessential matters, his catholic outlook, his politeness, all of which may be considered as aspects of his suggestibility.

The characteristic which perforce strikes a reader of Gandhi's early life is the sensitiveness of his conscience. Conscience manifests itself in terms of sensitivity to sufferings and injustices, to rights and wrongs. In a sense, conscience is *authoritative*. He did not remember having ever told a lie, either to his teachers or to his school-mates. The circumstances of Gandhi's childhood were such as to encourage the growth of conscience. He did not remember his father ever beating up any of his children. He described his father as quick-tempered, just and a lover of truth. He was the *Diwan* of the state, was conspicuously intelligent and able. Young Gandhi's fear of him is evident from the celebrated story of his stealing gold from his brother's bracelet, his repentance and confession. This confession was for him the first lesson on the powers of truthfulness and love (*ahiṃsā*). This sowed the seed of the philosophy of Truth and Non-violence which he preached and practised during the rest of his life.

As he noted in his *Autobiography* : "This was for me an object lesson in *Ahimsa*...when such *Ahimsa* becomes all-embracing, it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power."

Gandhi acknowledged that he learnt the lesson of *Ahiṃsā* from Kasturba also. To quote him : "Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand and her quiet submission to my stupidity involved on the other, ultimately made me ashamed

of myself and cured me of my stupidity in thinking that I was born to rule over her ; and in the end she became my teacher in non-violence. And what I did in South Africa was but an extension of the rule of Satyagraha she practised in her own person."

Gandhi's life was a life of service. No form of service had been more attractive to him than that of nursing the sick and the wounded and healing the afflicted. He attended upon his sick father with devotion in his early teens. It became an enduring passion with him.

Philosophical Roots and Tradition

Gandhi used to refer to his conscience as the ultimate authority. Conscience, it may be said, is the internalized experience of the *mores* of a given society.[3]* A brief review of the philosophical concepts and folkways might indicate how Gandhi internalized the age-old tradition of India and went to the people of India with teachings phrased in terms of the Vedas, with Upaniṣadic *ślokas*, with verses from the *Gītā* and with exhortations familiar from time immemorial. Vincent Sheean observes : "Centuries of Hinduism produced him...he was profoundly Hindu."[4] "No country but India and no religion but Hinduism could have given birth to a Gandhi", said the editorial in the London *Times* on the day after his death.[5] In a recent biographical study we read : "Gandhi could only have been a Hindu. His qualities and defects were peculiar to his race. In India alone could he have been born."[6] These references to his ancestral faith suggest that because of the traditional heritage it was possible for Gandhi to preach the message of Truth and Non-violence.

Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose observes : "it would perhaps be wrong to say that one particular point of view, or one specific tradition, is exclusively Indian while the rest are aberrations. It would be more correct to say that there have been various

* "The conscience of one age and place is not that of another."—John Lewis, *The Case Against Pacifism*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1939 ?, p. 23.

traditions in Indian civilization which have varied in course of time, in different parts of India, or within the numerous strata which make up India's social organization."[7] Another reviewer notes that in the history of Indian thought there is always an interplay of two opposite trends running parallel to each other throughout the ages. This appears in the cases of *dharma* and *artha*, *kāma* and *sañnyāsa*, *karma* and salvation. To this list may be added the twin concepts of war and its glorification and non-violence and its role in human progress.[8] As was usual, the common people of India loved to live a peaceful life, while the kings could only bask in their glory by crossing swords. But there was another tradition too which was deeply rooted in a deeper and more organized attitude which sprang up from various forms of Indian or Hindu religious belief. Jainism and Buddhism form parts of this tradition.[9]

Gandhi's philosophy of *satyāgraha* based on truth, non-violence and suffering and the disciplines of renunciation, non-attachment, *brahmacaryya* etc. that he incorporated in his *āśrama*-life, are rooted in tradition. We shall, however, concentrate in this brief outline on the three elements in *Satyāgraha* and passing references may be made in the case of other concepts.

Satya

Truth is the central point in Indian philosophical literature. *Satyaññāsti paro dharmah* : there is no religion or duty greater than truth. "The true prevails, not the untrue ; by the true the path is laid out, the way of the gods (*devayāna*), on which the old sages, satisfied in their desires, proceed to where there is that highest place of the True One." (Muṇḍaka *Upaniṣad*, *III*). Other scriptural injunctions may be cited to show that the concept of truth is one of the essentials of Hinduism.

The concept of truth has been approached from various points of view in Indian philosophy. But we are concerned here not with the truth concept in Indian ontology or epistemology, but with its ethical concept which has a direct

bearing on *Satyāgraha*. For Gandhi, as we shall see later, was not a philosopher, but primarily a man of ethics. And his *Satyāgraha* was based on his ethical understanding. *Satya* of *Satyāgraha* is ethical. With Gandhi, *Satyāgraha* was a means of realizing the truth of human unity.

In the objective and social ethics of the Hindus, the concept of *Satya* occupies a prominent place. In Manu's classification of duties, *Satya* is listed among the *Sādhāraṇa-dharmas* or common duties.* In Praśastapāda's classification of the duties *Satyavacana* or 'speaking the truth' is one of the generic or *Sāmānya* duties, i.e., common to all *āśramas* or stages of life and all *varṇas* or social classes and communities.**

* Under the class of the *Sādhāraṇadharmas* Manu enumerates the following ten :

Steadfastness (*Dhṛti*)
Forgiveness (*Kṣamā*)
Application (*Dama*)
Non-appropriation, i.e., Avoidance of Theft (*Cauryābhāva*)
Cleanliness (*Śauca*)
Repression of the Sensibilities and Sensuous appetites (*Indriya-nigraha*)
Wisdom (*Dhī*)
Learning (*Vidyā*)
Veracity (*Satya*)
Restraint of Anger (*Akrodha*)

—Sushil Kumar Maitra, *The Ethics of the Hindus*, University of Calcutta, 1963, p. 8.

** According to Praśastapāda's classification, the following are the generic or *sāmānya* duties :

Moral Earnestness, Regard For the Spiritual (*Dharme Śraddhā, Dharme Manaḥprasādaḥ*).
Refraining from injury to living beings (*Ahiṃsā*).
Seeking the good of the creatures (*Bhūtahitava*).
Speaking the truth (*Satyavacana*).
Refraining from theft (*Asteya*).
Sexual continence (*Brahmacarya*).
Sincerity, purity of motive (*Anupadhā*).
Renouncing or restraining anger (*Krodhavarjana*).
Ablution, Personal cleanliness (*Abhiṣecana, Snāna*).
The eating of linseeds and other specified substances on special occasions for the object of śuci or purification of the body. (Sucidravy-asevana).
Devotion to the Deities recognised by the Vedas (*Viśiṣṭa-Devatā-bhakti*).
Fasting on specified occasions (*upavāsa*).
Moral watchfulness (*apramāda*), *i.e.*, the unfailing performance of the unconditional duties (*nityanaimittikānāṃ karmaṇām avaśyam-bhāvena karaṇam*)—Sushil Kumar Maitra, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

The stories of Dhruva and Prahlāda, which captured the imagination of young Gandhi, as has been noted already, were a part of the traditional folklore of India. Gandhi used to recount those stories to illustrate the meaning of *Satyāgraha.*

"The Mahabharata", Gandhi held, "sums up its teachings by declaring emphatically that truth outweighs everything else on earth."[10]

Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyāgraha*, rooted though in the Indian tradition, was also original in the sense that he made significant innovations. He at once was tied to the traditional roots and went ahead of them. The *sādhāraṇadharmas* or the *sāmānya* duties that a Hindu is enjoined upon by the *Śastras* to perform, emphasize the attainment of the individual's own perfection. But Gandhi gave this individual virtue a social orientation.

Prof. Sushil Kumar Maitra holds : "There is practically no recognition of the social duties proper, i.e., of the duties of social service in a positive sense as distinguished from negative toleration (*Kṣamā*) and non-appropriation (*Cauryābhāva*). Even veracity does not necessarily imply positive social service in this sense : it aims at negative non-interference rather than positive service and it may be practised purely as a dianoetic virtue of self-culture, i.e., as absolute self-dedication to Truth. In any case there is no necessary implication of any positive social service in veracity any more than there is in the other enumerations under the common duties. If follows therefore that Hindu morality primarily aimed at the autonomy of the individual, i.e., at making him self-sufficient and self-dependent and free from all external bonds, physical and social."[11]

Dr. A. C. Bouquet observes : "Gandhiji was nobly inconsistent when he made unselfish service of his fellow-men part of the discipline to which he subjected himself in order to free his soul from the bonds of the flesh, since self-forgetful service of others is a Christian, not a Hindu idea."[12]

Kshiti Mohan Sen's comments on Dr. Bouquet's observation is also noted here :

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"There is indeed some justice in this criticism of Hindu values, since renunciation for personal freedom has been one of its most widely practised aspects. There is no doubt, however, that in the complex Hindu system of values, self-forgetful service of others has been no less basic a tenet than renunciation. This has been emphasized in many Hindu texts, but particularly in that great work on Hindu morality, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Mahatma Gandhi mentioned that he found his ideal of service in this document."[13]

We shall see at an appropriate place how far and to what extent Christianity influenced the mental development of Gandhi and with that, his philosophy.

Satyāgraha, as has been noted by Dr. Bondurant, was indeed familiar to the ear of the Indian, but its meaning, in terms ef truth-attainment, departed from the body of traditional Hindu notions of the function of the truth-ethic. Truth, *Satya*, was the core of the Gandhian technique as of the overall Gandhian philosophy. But *Satyāgraha* as a social instrument has projected the traditional ethical laws into the realm of social action.[14]

Ahiṃsā

Writing under the title, 'Indian Question', Mr. H. N. Brailsford remarks : "When Gandhi spoke, India for the first time heard itself thinking aloud. His dominating idea (ahimsa) had been hers for thousands of years ; his method of silent protest (the *hartal*, which means a public mourning than a general strike) had always been the traditional expedient of the East for checking tyranny. India had always believed that a saint could by his austerities control the universe ; this rooted faith in the power of self-discipline Gandhi turned to political account."[15]

Prof. A. C. Underwood, on the other hand, is not ready to acknowledge that Gandhian non-violence is rooted in Hindu tradition. He writes : "The Hindu sacred writings abound in instances of men who by self-mortification acquired power over gods and men. But in none of these does the thought appear

of active benevolence to others. This is a distinctive Christian concept and in so far as Mr. Gandhi has incorporated it into his idea of *Satyāgraha* he has derived it not from Hinduism but from the Sermon On The Mount."[16]

Heiler claims that Gandhi belonged to the great Christian 'passion-mystics', because in his heart there lived a holy love for the Cross of Suffering such as is completely unknown in Indian religion.[17] He calls Mahatma 'an unbaptized Christian'.

Prof. Underwood's and Heiler's view seems to us to be based on an oversimplified version of Hinduism. Gandhi was undoubtedly influenced by Christianity and we shall discuss that point subsequently. But to deny the root of his philosophy of non-violence would be a mistake. We would rather like to agree with Brailsford that *ahiṃsā* had been an important concept in India's thought for thousands of years.

The concept of non-violence first appeared possibly as a reaction to the wanton and widespread slaughter of animals in the Vedic sacrifices. But subsequently the concept widened in its scope and implications and by the sixth century B.C. became a vital force in the intellectual life of the country.[18] Ever since the time of the Upaniṣads the virtue of *ahiṃsā* or non-injury to all living beings, men and animals, has been emphasized upon. According to T. W. Rhys Davids, the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* "first finds expression in a mystical passage in the Chandogya Upanishad (3. 17) where five ethical qualities, one being *ahimsa*, are said to be equivalent to a part of the sacrifice of which the whole life of a man is made an epitome."[19]*

Prof. Louis Renou says that the motive of non-violence recurs again and again in Indian civilization. To quote him : "the laws of Manu, for instance, forbid the Brahmin to practise agriculture because ploughing, harvesting and threshing constitute 'pramrita', that is, according to the traditional explanation,

* "In Chandogya (iii. 17) meditation, charity, right dealing, non-injury to life and truthfulness are laid down as right forms of conduct."—S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I., George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1948, pp. 219-220. See also Ibid., p. 148.

the means of destroying the animalcules living in the soil or in plants. The Hindu's regard for life is well-known."[20]

The *Sutras* of Gautama give a prominent place to the virtue of *ahiṃsā*.[21]

In Praśastapāda's classification of *Sāmānya-dharma*, as we have seen above, *ahiṃsā* is noted as a duty. "Ahiṃsā is a duty not simply in the negative sense of mere cessation from harm or injury (*hiṃsābhāva*) but also in the positive sense of a definite *resolve* not to hurt a living being (*bhūtānam anabhidrohasaṃkalpaḥ*)".[22]

Patañjali, whose *Yogasūtra* Gandhi studied in 1903 in South Africa[23], included *ahiṃsā* in his *pancha yamas*, i.e., the restraints that purify the mind of the evil passions and thus clear the ground for *Yoga*. These virtues are: *Ahiṃsā* (Tenderness, Benevolence, Goodwill), *Satya* (veracity), *Asteya* (abstention from theft), *Brahmacaryya* (continence), *Aparigraha* (renunciation). As we shall see later Gandhi elaborated these cardinal principles and made them an integral part of the discipline of the *Satyāgrahī*. In Patañjali's classification of the virtues, ahiṃsā though negatively stated as abstention from *hiṃsā* or causing injury to living beings, also implies positive goodwill and amity with all creatures. Furthermore, it is a virtue which is to be cultivated without any exception as to particular creatures and also without any restrictions as to specific occasions or particular methods: *sarvathā sarvadā sarvabhūtānām anabhidroha*.[24]

The Epic Age has generally been considered to be an age of war and as such it had little occasion for developing theories of non-violence, though "Ahimsā or non-violence is the highest duty" is a well-known saying of the *Mahābhārata*.* Gandhi wrote: "The Mahabharata and the Ramayana .....

* Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣthira: "Ahiṃsā is the highest religion. It is again the highest penance. It is also the highest truth from which all duty proceeds."—*Anuśasanaparva* (CIV, 25). For emphasis on *ahiṃsā*, see also *Anuśasanaparva* (CV, 23-45). Similarly for Truth, see *Śāntiparva* (CLXXXVIII, 61-74).

Kindliness, forgiveness, peacefulness, *ahiṃsā*, truth, straightforwardness, absence of pride, modesty, forbearance and tolerance are the ways to attain *Brahmaṇ*.—*Śāntiparva* (CCLV, 39-40.)

are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. ...My notions were an outcome of a study of the Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads etc."[25]

The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, or *Gītā* for short, means the Song of the Lord, and is a part of the great epic *Mahābhārata*. The philosophic background of the *Gītā* is taken from the Upaniṣads. The message of the *Gīta* is the philosophical basis of popular Hinduism. It is regarded as a *Smṛti* or a tradition and is considered to be the most influential work in Indian thought.[26] It has been subject to varying interpretations. It is beyond our scope to judge whether the *Gītā* stands for *dharma-yuddha* or *ahiṃsā*. Our main concern is to find out the influence of the *Gītā* on Gandhi's philosophy and his understanding of the message of the *Gītā*. It may be said without fear of contradiction that of all the books that moulded Gandhi's thought, the *Gīta* occupies the pre-eminent place.

Gandhi's first acquaintance with the *Gīta* began in 1888-89 via the verse translation by Sir Edwin Arnold, known as the *Song Celestial*. Later on, he studied most of its important commentaries. It had been his constant endeavour to reduce to practice the teaching of the *Gītā* as he had understood it. He regarded it as "the spiritual reference book."[27] The *Gītā* was for him "the key to the scriptures of the world" and he never ceased to think of its lesson as the perfect expression (according to his interpretation) of *ahiṃsā* or non-violence which to him was the final flower of truth. In 1925, speaking to Christian missionaries in Calcutta on July 28 (as reported in *Young India*, 6-8-25, p. 273), he said :

"I must tell you in humility that Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep

impression upon me, but I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect upon me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*."

The central teaching of the *Gita* is *Anāsakti* (selfless action) —the way to self-realization. The *Gītā* is not a treatise on non-violence nor was it written to condemn war and establish ahiṃsā. For it was, according to Gandhi, an accepted and primary duty even before the Gītā age.[28] According to Gandhi, "*Anasakti* transcends *Ahimsa*. He who would be *anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary, it is included in *Anasakti*, it does not go beyond it."[29]

If a little digression be permitted, we would like to refer to a point raised by Mr. Vincent Sheean which is not altogether irrelevant to the purpose of our present study.

While recognising that the Gītā was for Gandhi 'the supreme scripture', Mr. Vincent Sheean makes out : "Mr. Gandhi appears in the very last period of his life to have gone still further back, to the Upanishad, for his quintessential truth. What he urged upon me was the *Isha Upanishad* and not the Gita, and he told me he had found its authority when he was looking for something to quote to Christians, on his visit to Travancore in 1946. It may be that something more fundamental, simpler than the *Gita* fitted the needs of his spirit in these months which accompanied and followed the liberation of India."[30] Sheean's construction of Gandhi's advice seems to be far-fetched in its philosophic implications and is based on a factual inaccuracy. It was not during the months 'which accompanied and followed the liberation of India' that Gandhi quoted the *Upaniṣad* to Christians. The reference in question was made a decade earlier and as such Mr. Sheean's construction

cannot be justified since it ascribes to a particular critical period of political development. It would be better if we refer to the *Harijan* and/or the standard biography, *Mahatma* by D. G. Tendulkar.

During his 'pilgrimage to Travancore' in the middle of January 1937, Gandhi at a public meeting in Quilon on January 16 summed up for the first time the credal belief of Hinduism in an Upaniṣadic *mantra*, and thereafter at every meeting he gave lucid and simple commentaries on the numerous implications of that *mantra*. He said at Quilon :

"Let me for a few moments consider what Hinduism consists of, what it is that has fired so many saints about whom we have historical record. Why has it contributed so many philosophers to the world ? What is it in Hinduism that has so enthused its devotees for centuries ?...In the midst of my struggle against untouchability I have been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we John 3.16 of the Bible. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them ? Some have said, and not without good reason, the Gayatri answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the Gayatri *mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then as you are aware I have, for years past, been swearing by the Bhagavad-Gita, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *Kamadhenu*, my guide, my 'open sesame', on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a prayerful study before the *Kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

"But I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the *Ishopanishad*. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in

Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the *Ishopanishad* were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

"Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part reads : 'All this that we see in this great universe is pervaded by God.' Then come the second and third parts which read together. I divide these into two and translate them thus : Renounce it and enjoy it. There is another rendering which means the same thing, though : Enjoy what He gives you. Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part which means : Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession. All the other *mantras* of that ancient Upanishad are a commentary on an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*. As I read the *mantra* in the light of the Gita or the Gita in the light of the *mantra* I find that the Gita is a commentary on this *mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the socialist and the communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true—and I hold it to be true—you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this, that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the universe ? The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that he has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything

is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought : 'Do not covet anybody's possession.' The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter."

It is this *mantra* that Gandhiji described at another meeting as the golden key to the solution of all the difficulties and doubts that may assail one's heart.

"Remember that one verse of the *Ishopanishad* and forget all about the other scriptures. You can of course drown yourselves and be suffocated in the ocean of scriptures. They are good for the learned if they will be humble and wise, but for the ordinary man in the street nothing but that *mantra* is necessary to carry him across the ocean :

"'God the Ruler pervades all there is in this universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him, and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possessions'."[31]

We need hardly make any apology for reproducing this long excerpt for this brings out clearly why Gandhi preferred that the philosophically-inclined American should read the *Iśopaniṣad*. His suggestion should not be taken to mean that Gandhi—the man of action—grew contemplative in his last days at a period of crisis in national life and searched for what could more fit 'the needs of his spirit in those months'. This note is given since it is generally supposed that "The *Bhagavad-Gītā* have always appealed to the man of action, just as the *Upanishads* have always held an appeal for the contemplative intellectual."[32] As a matter of fact Gandhi was conversant with the *Upaniṣads* since as early as 1909.[33]

The *Bhakti* movement which spread all over India in between the tenth and nineteenth centuries championed non-violence. Louis Renou observes : "On the whole, we must look for Gandhi's forerunners in the leaders of sects, the countless men who 'cleared paths' and 'opened up ways'. In the middle ages and up to the present, there are examples of such men, coming from all social and spiritual strata, gathering communities about them, adopting new gospels, sometimes trying to make their way in the social or political field by means which they invariably claimed to derive from those gospels. Such are Basava in the 12th century with the Lingayats, Ramananda and Kabir in the 15th century, Nanak, the founder of the Sikhs, in the 15th and 16th centuries. But what these men viewed in terms of the locality and of the needs of the sect, Gandhi conceived of India as a whole."[34] Krishnalal Sridharani pointed out : "Hundreds of legends, along with innumerable mystic songs (devotional songs of Mira Bai, *c.* 1504 and of others) have created in India a general belief in the efficacy of non-violence. To Gandhi himself these songs were a source of genuine inspiration and he and his followers never failed to realize the propaganda value of such lyrics in disseminating their ideology."[35]

Though the Jains are not the originators of the *Ahiṃsā* doctrine yet to Jainism belongs the glory of making *ahiṃsā* the fundamental basis of all its teachings. According to Jainism, the way to salvation lies through the three jewels (*triratna*) : *jñāna* (knowledge of reality as it is), *śraddhā* (faith in the teachings of the Jinas), and *cāritra* (cessation from doing all that is evil). This *cāritra* consists of *ahiṃsā* (not taking any life even by mistake or unmindfulness), *sūnṛta* (speaking in such a way as is true, good and pleasing), *asteya* (not taking anything which has not been given), *brahmacaryya* (abandoning lust for all kinds of objects, in mind, speech and body), and *aparigraha* (abandoning attachment for all things). Prof. Surendranath Dasgupta held that these strict rules of conduct only applied to ascetics who were bent on attaining perfection. The standard proposed for the ordinary householders is fairly

workable. Great stress is laid upon the virtues of *ahiṃsā*, *sūnṛta*, *asteya* and *brahmacaryya*, but the root of all these is *ahiṃsā*. The virtues of *sūnṛta*, *asteya* and *brahmacaryya* are made to follow directly as secondary corollaries of ahiṃsā. "Ahiṃsā may thus be generalized as the fundamental ethical virtue of Jainism ; judgment on all actions may be passed in accordance with the standard of ahiṃsā ; sunṛta, asteya and brahmacaryya are regarded as virtues as their transgression leads to hiṃsā (injury to beings)."[36]

Radhakrishnan says : "The chief feature of Jainism is *ahiṃsa*, or respect for and abstinence from everything that has life. The scrupulous enforcement of this rule has led to many practices which come in for cheap sneering at the hands of unsympathetic students. Lest any life be destroyed, some Jains sweep the ground, as they go, walk veiled for fear of inhaling a living organism, strain water and reject even honey."[37] The Jain doctrine of *ahiṃsā* is an 'extreme application of a great sovereign truth'. In the words of C.F. Andrews, "it has become a burden to humanity almost impossible to bear."[38] Gandhi though influenced by Jainism, did not accept the literal interpretation of the doctrine. His general attitude was : "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." In Gandhi's doctrine of *ahiṃsā* there is no undue emphasis on the sacredness of sub-human life in preference to human life.

Buddhism which was a revolt against the hardened formalism of Brahmanical tradition has left a permanent mark on the culture of India. The Hindu faith has absorbed the best of its ethics. The basic tenets of Buddhism are well known, and they include the doctrine of the Middle Path (avoidance of extremes) ; non-violence ; non-hatred ; friendliness to all ; renunciation ; continence ; and the ideal of reaching *nirvāṇa*, freedom from the cycle of births. The Buddha emphasized the importance of the qualities of *avera* (non-hatred) and *karuṇā* (compassion) which form the philosophical foundations of the concept of non-violence. "For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time", declares The *Dhammapada*, "hatred ceases by not-hatred, this is an old rule." "Lead others not

by violence, but by righteousness and equity."[39] "Conquer your foe by force, you increase his enmity. Conquer by love, and you will reap no after-sorrow."[40]

Ahiṃsā in Jainism and Buddhism was understood more as an ethical than as a social concept in that it referred primarily to individual rather than collective action. The non-violence of Aśoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India—'the only military monarch on record who abandoned warfare after victory'[41]—did not lead him to the logically necessary step of renouncing the fruits of conquests based on armed warfare. He did not disband his armies, nor did he abolish the death penalty though he prohibited animal sacrifices and issued injunctions against the unregulated killing of birds and animals for the royal kitchen. His *ahiṃsā* remained confined, more or less, to certain personal spheres of his life. Gandhi while inheriting the tradition of non-violence enriched it further and put it in the collective sphere of life

Tapasyā

Tapas or self-suffering is one of the severe disciplines that Indian philosophy enjoins upon one to cultivate for attaining truth. It is in the most rigorous self-restraint, according to the classical *Yoga* law, that the Indian hopes to find the true road. Whatever be the path to the realization of God—Impersonal or Personal—*jñāna*, *karma* or *bhakti*—the concept of sacrifice is emphasized upon. The concept of sacrifice evolved through the Vedic period from complex ritualism to self-imposed suffering. "It was inevitable", Radhakrishnan tells us of the Vedic age, "that sacrifices should come. For the depth of one's affection for God consists in the surrender of one's property and possessions to Him. We pray and offer."[42] *Tapas* in the Hindu scriptures refers variously to religious austerity, bodily mortification, and penance, and is closely identified with renunciation. To quote Radhakrishnan again: "It is true that here and there the Upaniṣads speak of *tapas* as a means of spiritual realisation. But *tapas* only means the development of soul force, the freeing of the soul from

slavery to body, severe thinking or energising of mind.... Our enjoyment of the world is in direct proportion to our poverty. A call to renunciation in the sense of killing out the sense of separateness and developing disinterested love is the essence of all true religion."[43] The traditional concept of *Tapas*, however sublime might have been the idea, could not permeate through the fabric of daily life of the common people of the land. It was more or less associated with the pursuit of spiritual life for attaining *mokṣa* or salvation. It was left for Gandhi to extend this spiritual discipline to the realm of group action, where it became an essential element in the technique of *satyāgraha*. As we shall see later, Gandhi seized upon the traditional concepts only to give new meanings to them.

Renunciation

Gandhi, no doubt, accepted renunciation as 'the law of life', but it was not the renunciation of the world as the renunciation of selfish desires that he had in view: "all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity." It is such a kind of renunciation which, according to him, "differentiates mankind from the beast."[44]

The tradition of Vrata and Gandhi

It is well known that the observance of the eleven vows* formed an integral part of the discipline and training of the inmates of *Satyāgrahāśrama*. The first seven of these vows

*The vows obligatory for an *āśrama* inmate were as follows:
1. The vow of truth. 2. The doctrine of *ahiṃsā*. 3. The vow of celibacy. 4. The vow of the control of the palate. 5. The vow of non-thieving. 6. The vow of non-possession. 7. The vow of fearlessness. 8. The vow of *svadeśī*. 9. The vow regarding the 'Untouchables'. 10. Education through the vernaculars. 11. The vow of Khaddar (manual labour).—From an address delivered in the YMCA Auditorium, Madras, on 16 February 1916, explaining the vows observed by the members of the *Satyāgrahāśram*, Ahmedabad. Quoted in *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. R. K. Prabhu & U. R. Rao, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1946, pp. 177-186. For further explanation of these vows, see *From Yeravda Mandir*. The five *Yamas* of Patañjali *Yoga Sūtras* (*ahiṃsā*, truth, abstention from theft or greed, continence and renunciation) which Gandhi read in 1903 (See *An Autobiography*, 1959 Popular Edition, p. 194) were incorporated among the vows of *Satyāgrahāśram* at Sabarmati.

had already been an integral part of the ancient religious heritage of India and every religious seeker for God or *mokṣa* aspired to observe these vows in his life. By introducing these vows into the life of a *satyāgrahī*, Gandhi took them out of their religious setting and placed them on the social plane. Thus he gave the ancient vows a completely new orientation and enriched them with a new socio-ethical content. It was to his credit that he did not limit himself or the other *satyāgrahīs* to the observance of traditional vows alone ; he supplemented the traditional vows with four new ones : viz., bread labour, observance of *svadeśī*, abolition of untouchability and tolerance i.e., equality of religions.[45]

Tolerance

Prof. Louis Renou finds another constant attitude in Indian tradition. Tolerance is that constant attitude. It was the infinite power of absorption of the Hindu *dharma*, which created the essential conditions of this tolerance.[46] Being a product of such a tradition, it was possible for Gandhi to expound that different people, each of them holding a limited view of truth, could work in perfect harmony if only they had the same respect for the truth of others as they had for theirs own. This forms the philosophic background of Gandhi's concept of democracy. The English liberal tradition might also have helped him to foster such an attitude.

Upaniṣadic tradition and Gandhi's socio-economic philosophy

Gandhi's doctrine of trusteeship and other tenets of his socio-economic philosophy were based upon the Upaniṣadic tradition of enjoyment through renunciation. He added a sociological content to the philosophical concept and offered this for adoption as a social doctrine.

Gandhi while recognizing the fact of class antagonism did not believe like the Marxists that class antagonisms were irreconcilable. His rejection of the Marxian theory of classes may be ascribed to the Hindu conception of *Dvandātīta* (reconciliation of opposites). The object of Hindu philosophy

is the elimination of this conflict and not the accentuation or intensification of it. As one reviewer says: "The doctrine of *dwandatita*, one who has reconciled inherent contradictions which Indian tradition has always proclaimed as its social objective has found new strength in the Mahatma's teachings."[47]

Hindu political tradition and Gandhi

In ancient Indian political thought, there was no philosophy of anarchism in the accepted sense of the term. *Rājadharma* came to supersede all other *dharmas*, for, if the king failed in his duty of protecting and ensuring peace, all else would be reduced to naught. The *Mahābhārata* aptly compares the king performing the *rājadharma* to the sun dispelling darkness. "Like the rein unto the steed and the goad to the elephant, is *rājadharma* to the people." (Śānti Parva, 37-41) If the king fails in his *dharma* the people cannot be expected to follow their respective *svadharmas*. This is what Bhīṣma means when he says that all duties have *rājadharma* at their head and that all duties are swallowed up in those of the king just as the foot-prints of all creatures sink in those of the elephant. The *Manu Saṃhitā* (VII, 3-4), describing the origin of kingship as the means avoiding the evils of *mātsyanyāya*, states: "For when these creatures being without a king dispersed through fear in all directions, the Lord created a klng for the protection of this whole creation taking for that purpose eternal particles of Indra, of the wind, of Yama, of the sun, of fire, of Varuna, of the moon and of the Lord of wealth (Kubera)." The nature and functions of the king's office as understood in ancient India are succintly put by Bhīṣma in the *Mahābhārata*: it is "the foundation of individual security (comprising the security of person and property), as well as the stability of the social order, the basis of the great institutions of family and property, the support of the fundamental law of the social order and the guarantee of the normal functioning of the social, the economic and the religious activities of the people."[48] As Altekar states, the "State in

ancient India was regarded as the centre of society and the chief instrument for its welfare, and hence it was permitted to have a wide sphere of activity. Individual liberty did not appreciably suffer in consequence, primarily because the State discharged its multifarious functions not exclusively through its own bureaucracy."[49] "The *laissez-faire* theory which advocates that the sphere of the state's activity should be reduced to the narrowest functions consistent with the preservation of law and order was not at all popular. The activity of the state was to embrace the whole of human life, both here and hereafter."[50] According to Anjaria : "Our ancient sages and thinkers conceived of the office of kingship as the sustainer and preserver of the order of the universe and hence of the social order. Naturally, therefore, they never evince a distrust of governmental action."[51] U.N. Ghoshal writes : "the State was regarded in the Hindu eyes as an essential instrument for securing not merely the whole life, but also the bare existence, of the people. This conception led, not only in the 'secular' *Arthaśāstra*, but also in later Brahmanical canon to the view that the State was within certain limits virtually an end in itself."[52]

Gandhi's political ideal deriving its inspiration, to a large extent, from Western thinkers like Thoreau, Tolstoy etc., does not incorporate this near-totalitarian concept of state. Power or political authority is not an end in itself, Gandhi declared. But at the same time his political philosophy is not vapid idealism. He recognised power to be "one of the means of enabling people to better their conditions in every department of life."[53] This recognition speaks of his awareness of the reality the stamp of which is imprinted on his political thought. Notwithstanding his philosophical opposition to the state as an institution, Gandhi's political actions were directed towards the attainment of power which, according to him, should not be concentrated in the hands of a few but disseminated among the masses of the people.

We have considered above the sources of power of the state and the nature of its authority. Now to consider another

aspect of the Hindu political tradition. The right to revolt is one of the clearly recognized rights of individuals and groups in Indian political thought. A king not abiding by the dictates of ethics and justice was threatened, on the one hand, with dire consequences in hell. The other was the threat of revolt.[54] The *Mahābhārata*[55] recognizes it and Manu condones the overthrow of the wicked king as not sinful.[56] In a well-known passage, Bhīṣma goes so far as to say that the king who fails to protect his people should be slain by his subjects like a mad dog afflicted with rabies. Though from time to time there is a streak of despondency, as when Śukra counsels "resignation to the will of a bad king as to the unnatural acts of parents and the inscrutable ways of providence", or suggests that "subjects may leave the land ruled by an unrighteous king and constantly frighten him by going over to his virtuous and powerful enemy", the concept of the right to revolution is acknowledged, though sometimes in a hesitant manner.[57] For Śukra himself says in another place in *Nītisāra* that "if the king although highborn becomes averse to good qualities, policy and strength, and is unrighteous, he should be repudiated as the destroyer of the kingdom. In his place the Purohita should install a virtuous prince of his family for the protection of the subjects after *approval of the latter*."[58] Prof. B. G. Gokhale comments : "And since the approval of the subjects is involved in this dynastic change the right to revolution stands forth as one of the important rights of the people."[59] Long before Śukra, Manu had stated that "the king who through folly oppresses his kingdom, (will) together with his relatives, ere long be deprived of his life and of his kingdom. As the lives of living creatures are destroyed by tormenting their bodies, even so the lives of kings are destroyed by their oppressing their kingdoms."[60] A study of Hindu political theories suggests that the right to revolt was a recognized concept till the end of ancient times.

Gandhi's clarion call for non-violent revolt against the constituted authority that sustains itself on *adharma*—a 'satanic government' he called it—is, in a sense, the continuation

of the Indian tradition, But it was not in the realm of literal adherence to tradition that his genius lay ; while he accepted the traditional injunction to stand up in revolt against an unjust and immoral political authority, he at the same time developed this tradition further by introducing *satyāgraha* —a novel technique of political action which aims at an end of immoral power-authority while avoiding the pitfalls of violent manifestation of armed warfare. This shows that while being rooted in tradition, he could transcend the ancient tradition to evolve his technique in conformity with the demands of the situation as with his fundamental faith in non-violence which he held to be the supreme law of human life.

The traditonal methods of conflict resolution

Mr. H. N. Brailsford discussing the historical origins of passive resistance and non-co-operation writes : "Passive resistance committed by an individual or by the state, has been at all times a characteristic practice of oriental peoples... The ideal from which it originated in the East derive from the most primitive thinking of mankind. To this day in India a man who has suffered wrong from a neighbour, for example, by the non-payment of a debt, will sit down before the latter's door and starve himself to death. The threat usually suffices, for if the victim should die his ghost would haunt the wrongdoer. The closing of the bazaar as a general protest against any form of oppression is probably linked with the same idea, for in India it has a quasi-religious character and is observed as a day of mourning (*hartal*). A deathlike abstention from the normal activities of life, it operates against someone and is intended to put him in the wrong and to expose him to moral or, more properly, to spiritual sanctions. From time immemorial it has been the one effective form of resistance to oppression known to the subjects of eastern despots. A variant of it is the use of the right of asylum practised en masse.

"These traditional Indian elements blend in the elaborate technique, first of passive resistance to a specific wrong and

then of complete non-cooperation with a government based on force, which Gandhi evolved, first on behalf of the Indian immigrants and later to achieve India's independence. ...To this mystical doctrine, however, has been added a more worldly political technique, in part of western origin notably tax resistance, including the refusal to pay agricultural rents and the cutting down of the revenue from salt and liquor. The boycott of foreign goods is a thoroughly eastern expedient, having been used previously by the Chinese."[61]

Dharṇā (sitting down at the door of the oppressor with the resolve to die unless the wrong is redressed), *prāyopaveśana* (fasting unto death), *ājñābhanga* (civil disobedience), *deśatyāga* (leaving the country) are the instances of traditional methods which have been occasionally resorted to by individuals and in rare cases, even by small groups. Bishop Heber narrated the passive resistance by three hundred thousand persons of Benaras against the British government long before Gandhi's advent in Indian politics.[62] Similarly, in 1830, the entire population of Mysore practised non-co-operation against the tyranny of the ruler.[63] T. D. Broughton, who lived in the Maratha camp in 1809, gave an account of *dharṇā* as he observed it in his time.[64] Marco Polo also gave a description of a variety of the practice of *dharṇā* as he observed it in Southern India.[65] All these are instances of passive resistance which Gandhi distinguished from *satyāgraha*, the basis of which rests on constructive goodwill. Gandhi used the traditional methods only to introduce a novel element into social and political tactics.[66]

Gandhi : a traditionalist ?

C. F. Andrews wrote : "Mahatma Gandhi remains rooted in the soil of India. He is not *déraciné*, like so many of those who have stayed for a long time away from India and have adopted wholesale Western customs. His mind stretches out in ever wider and wider circles...but the centre of his being ever remained fixed in Hinduism itself, which is his first and only love."[67]

Gandhi himself frequently referred to himself as a *sanātanī* Hindu.[68] His Hindu fount remains unquestioned. But he did not find it difficult to combine heterodoxy with orthodoxy. His belief in *sanātanī* Hindu faith did not require him to accept as authentic everything that passed as *Śāstras*. He rejected everything that contradicted the fundamental principles of morality.[69] He declined to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it might have been, if it was repugnant to reason or moral sense.[70]* He placed individual conscience above the scriptures, morality over the Śāstric injunctions. This was distinctively a significant note in the tradition-bound Hindu society where spiritual authority held the supreme position. Dr. A. R. Wadia correctly notes : "he (Gandhi) has gone miles beyond the *Śabda Pramāṇa* of the traditional Hindu philosophy and heralds the birth of a new epoch of thought."[71] As in the matters of caste and untouchability, so he waged attacks in his own way also against the conservative spirit of sticking to the age-worn practices even when they went against the fundamental ethics. As a man of practical affairs, he deemed it advisable not to launch any frontal attack against the Hindu society rather he engaged himself in the task of pulling down and undermining the social institutions which ate into the vitals of the Hindu society. As Mr. Ranjee Sahanee observes : "Mr. Gandhi was adept at the little-known art of undermining institutions while appearing to preserve them."[72]

Gandhi's concept of Hinduism was in conformity with the temper of the age. The Hindu Reform movements that preceded him and the spirit of Indian Renaissance, or 'the great recovery', helped the growth of a new outlook. It was a step forward from the medieval stage (where religion was identified with social order and established institutions), to the modern stage, in which religion is a matter of private

*cf. "A Shastra, though man-made, should be accepted, if it appeals to reason ; and the contrary one rejected, though claiming to be inspired. We should be guided by our sense of the just alone. A saying sound in reason should be accepted, though it proceed from a child ; and the contrary one rejected as a straw, though it purport to proceed from the god Brahma." —*Yogavāsiṣṭha* (*Nyāya-Prakaraṇam*), Quoted in *Young India*. 8-3-28, p. 75.

conviction. This concept of religion generates catholic outlook which distinguished Gandhi.

Influence of Islam

The direct answer to what Gandhi himself had owed consciously to Islam as a religious faith, in the same way as he had owed to Buddhist and Christian teachings, is not altogether plain, but if C. F. Andrews' testimony is to be accepted then we may arrive at the conclusion that "the contact with Islam has made an immense difference to his own life."[73]

During his student days in England, when Gandhi read Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-worship*, he "learned of the Prophet's greatness, bravery and austere living."[74] An eclectic that he was, Gandhi welcomed every opportunity to express his admiration for such aspects of the Prophet's life as he had been able to appreciate and understand.[75]

Gandhi regarded "Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt there are differences in degree, but the object of these religions is peace. I have given my opinion that the followers of Islam are too free with the sword. But that is not due to the teaching of the Koran. This is due, in my opinion, to the environment in which Islam was born."[76] Referring to Islam, Gandhi mentioned as its distinctive contribution to India's national culture, "its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man for those who are nominally within its fold."[77]

As one who knew Gandhi 'personally from intimate experience', C. F. Andrews made certain observations which help us to understand the influence that Islam exerted on Gandhi's mind. To quote Andrews : "his profound admiration for the character of the Prophet Muhammad, as a man of faith and action, and also for his son-in-law Ali, as a man of tender love and suffering, has deeply affected him. He has been impressed to a remarkable degree by the nobility

of the early caliphate and the fervent faith of the first followers of the Prophet. The bare simplicity with which they lived, their chivalrous devotion to the poor, their intense belief in God's overruling majesty—all these things have had a great effect upon him ; for there is a puritan strain in Mahatma Gandhi to which such things as these most forcibly appeal.

"Furthermore, following the example set by the Prophet of Islam, Mahatma Gandhi has never for a moment separated the political from the spiritual, or failed to deal directly with the social evils which stood out before his eyes. Thus the Prophet's supreme, practical instinct as a Reformer, combined with his intense faith in God as the sole Creator and Director of the Universe, has been a constant strength and support to Mahatma Gandhi himself in his own struggle.

"Furthermore, whenever Mahatma Gandhi has turned from this political aspect of the struggle, in order to gain strength for the great conception of suffering injury without retaliation, he has constantly taken the character of the Prophet's son-in-law Ali, and of Hasan and Husain, for his example. ...Thus in his own way he has found the teaching of the Prophet of Islam fully compatible with the principle of Ahimsa, or Non-violence."[78]

Christian influence

However much Gandhi might have derived his inspiration of non-violence from Hinduism and Indian tradition, he was very largely influenced by the Christian ethic of love. Prof. A. J. Toynbee says : "an open-eyed and candid-minded observer, Occidental or Hindu, could hardly refuse to take seriously the manifest conquest of Gandhi's soul by the undying spirit of Christianity which had been repudiated by a majority of its late Modern Western carriers. The spiritual event that had liberated Gandhi's creative 'soul force' was an encounter, in the sanctuary of this sublime Hindu soul, between the spirit of Hinduism and the spirit of the Christian gospel embodied in the life of the Society of Friends. A cultural

barrage designed to keep out the powerloom was no obstacle to the Inner Light ; and the capitavation of Gandhi's soul by an alien culture on the religious plane was as decisive as it was auspicious."[79] Gandhi himself freely acknowledged his spiritual indebtedness to Christianity. His *Autobiography* records his Christian contacts in London and South Africa, and as such these need not be re-enumerated here in detail. Towards the end of his second year in England he felt much attracted towards reading religious literature. He plodded through the Old Testament and read the New, and was much impressed. "But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita*. The verses, 'But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And 'if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too', delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's 'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal' etc.* My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, *The Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly."[80] When questioned once by the Rev. J. J. Doke as to the sources from which he derived the ideas of *satyāgraha*, Gandhi said : "It was the New Testament which really awakened me to the rightness and value of Passive Resistance... *The Bhagavadgita* deepened the impression and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* gave it permanent form."[81] Gandhi called Jesus the Prince of Satyagrahis and said that he would not hesitate to call himself a Christian if he had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and his own interpretation of it.[82] Gandhi saw that the Sermon on the Mount was "The whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Chiristian life. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me."[83] "I have not been able to see" he said, "any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavadgita. What the Sermon describes

*The stanza quoted above. See p. 16 *n supra*.

in a graphic manner, the Bhagavadgita reduces to a scientfic formula. ...Today supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*."[84] This statement, made in 1927, might appear as a contradiction to the statement he had made before the Christian missonaries in Calcutta in 1925 (speech quoted above, pp. 25-26). Mr. Vincent Sheean explains that there is no real contradiction. The influence of the mood, of the occasion, and of the audience frequently determined variations in emphasis, and Gandhi did not always remember from one year to the next just what aspect of the truth he had chosen to emphasize on this or that occasion. The *Gītā* and the Sermon on the Mount, Sheean tells us, "were intimately interwoven in his consciousness, so that he was probably never sure himself which would speak to him most imperatively in the difficult moments. No doubt there were times when the Sermon on the Mount, "filled his whole being", and at other time it is extremely evident that the *Gita* had sovereign power over him."[85] This interpretation seems to be based on valid ground. Gandhi himself wrote : "There have been many times when I do not know which way to turn. But I have gone to the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, and have drawn strength from its message."[86]

The Cross symbolised the law of suffering to Gandhi. On seeing a painting of the crucified Christ in Rome, Gandhi remarked : "I saw there at once that nations like individuals could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way. Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself."[87] The message of love that Jesus preached did not reveal itself to Gandhi merely as a personal virture. "The love that Jesus taught and practised was not a mere personal virtue, but it was essentially a social virtue."[88] "I think the Sermon on the Mount has no meaning if it is not of vital use in everyday life to every one."[89] It reveals Gandhi's mind and gives us a clue to understanding the essential basis of Gandhi's philosophy which emphasizes upon the

application of the law of love in collective life. Gandhi was attracted towards Christianity because of its moral height ; its theology held no great appeal for him. Or, it may be said that he accepted Jesus more as a Prophet than as a Priest. It may be mentioned here incidentally that Gandhi accepted the Tolstoyan literalist interpretation of the Gospels which was not so much concerned with the social circumstances that made Jesus a prophet of humanity and the essential historical role of Christianity.* For Gandhi, as is obvious, the message of the Sermon on the Mount was of eternal value. And this message of love he preached and practised in his life.

The passion for service that marked his life owed much to Christian influence. As Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose observes : "...in his early make-up, there was a strong influence which was exercised by Christianity and I do believe that this early Christian influence led him, or developed to a very large extent, this sense of social responsibility in him. What he saw of the Missionaries—how they tried to allay human suffering, this intense feeling of social responsibility must have developed the germ which already lay within him ; but for this development I'd certainly say his association with the West and his deep association with English culture, and also Christian culture, was very largely responsible."[90]

Western thinkers

"Will you kindly tell me, Mr. Gandhi, what book or person has influenced you the most ?" Dr. S. W. Clemens, a Christian missionary asked Gandhi in the early part of 1920. Gandhi replied : "The Bible, Ruskin, Tolstoi."[91] In the *Autobiography* we read : "Three moderns have left a deep impress on my

*Dr. Dhirendra Mohan Datta observes : "It should be noted that Tolstoy's spiritual interpretation of Christianity, the presence of God within, brought Christianity near to the Vedantic idea of man ; his emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount and the conquering of hatred by love and evil by non-resistance seemed to Gandhi to be in exact conformity with Buddhist and Jaina teachings about *Ahimsa* put into social practice."—*The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1953, p. 13.

life, and captivated me : Raychand Bhai* by his living contact ; Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* ; and Ruskin by his *Unto This Last.*"[92]

From Ruskin's book Gandhi learned the dignity of manual labour, the idea that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all and that a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.[93] It was in the realm of economic thought that Ruskin's influence on Gandhi was most profound and as such it needs a closer treatment which shall be done at the proper place. (See Ch. 9., 'Ruskin's Influence on Gandhi')

The influence of Tolstoy on Gandhi is undisputed ; it had been emphasized upon by Gandhi many a time. "Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me." And "I made an intensive study of Tolstoy's books. *The Gospels in Brief*, *What to Do ?* and other books made a deep impression upon me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of Universal love."[94] "I look upon him as one of my teachers", Gandhi wrote in 1909 in a preface to Tolstoy's "Letter to a Hindoo".[95] He continuously recommended to his followers the study of Tolstoy's works, and particularly of the work : *The Kingdom of God Is Within You.* Gandhi read this book as early as 1893-1894.[96] He later wrote : "I was at that time a believer in violence. Its reading cured me of my scepticism and made a firm believer in ahimsa."[97] On August 3, 1942, in his appeal "To American Friends", Gandhi acknowledged his gratitude to Tolstoy for giving him a "reasoned basis" for

* Gandhi had great regard for Shri Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta, or Raychand Bhai, a Jain thinker to whom he devoted a chapter in *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* (Pt. II, Ch. I) and many references to him are to be found therein. (See pp. 99, 115, 149-50, 242, 1959 Popular Edition). Gandhi came into closest association with him on his return from England. His moral earnestness and deep religious nature attracted Gandhi. "His way of life was noble, like Tolstoy's", Gandhi wrote in the *Indian Opinion*, 5-6-1909 (*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Govt. of India, 1963, Vol. IX, p. 242). In particular Raychand Bhai helped Gandhi in the study of the Hindu religion. For a brief account of his views and work, see J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1915, pp. 327-28.

his non-violence. "Tolstoy blessed my movement in South Africa when it was still in its infancy and of whose wonderful possibilities I had yet to learn. It was he who had prophesised in his letter to me that I was leading a movement which was destined to bring a message of hope to the downtrodden people of the earth."[98]

The correspondence between Gandhi and Tolstoy[99] reveals how close were their views and their mutual regard and affection. We need not reproduce those letters. But the following extracts from Tolotoy's last letter to Gandhi, incidentlly the longest in the whole correspondence, which reached Gandhi in Transvaal several weeks after the death of Leo Tolstoy, will help us to appreciate the spiritual patronage of Tolstoy on Gandhi's experiments in *satyāgraha* in South Africa.

"...that which is called 'passive resistance', but which is in reality nothing else than the teaching of love uncorrupted by false interpretations. That love, which is the striving for the union of human souls and the activity derived from it, is the highest and only law of human life"..."This law was proclaimed by all—by the Indian as by the Chinese, Hebrew, Greek and Roman sages of the world. I think this law was most clearly expressed by Christ, who plainly said, 'In love alone is all the law and the prophets'.

"He knew, as every sensible man must know, that the use of force is incompatible with love as the fundamental law of life; that as soon as violence is permitted, in whichever case it may be, the insufficiency of the law of love is acknowledged, and by this the very law of love is denied.

"The difference between the Christian nations and all other nations is only that in the Christian world the law of love was expressed clearly and definitely, whereas it was not so expressed in any other religious teaching, and that the people of the Christian world have solemnly accepted this law, whilst at the same time they have permitted violence, and built their lives on violence; and that is why the whole life of the Christian peoples is a continuous contradiction between

that which they profess and the principles on which they order their lives—a contradiction between love accepted as the law of life and violence which is recognized and praised....

"Socialism, communism, anarchism, the Salvation Army, increasing crime, unemployment, the growing insane luxury of the rich and misery of the poor, the alarmingly increasing number of suicides—all these are the signs of that internal contradiction which must be solved and cannot remain unsolved. And they must be solved in the sense of acknowdging the law of love and denying violence.

"Therefore, your activity in the Transvaal, as it seems to us, at this end of the world, is the most essential work, the most important of all the work now being done in the world..."[100]

Gandhi summed up Tolstoy's teachings in the *Indian Opinion*, 2-9-1905 as follows :

1. In this world men should not accumulate wealth ;

2. No matter how much evil a person does to us, we should always do good to him. Such is the Commandment of God, and also His law ;

3. No one should take part in fighting ;

4. It is sinful to wield political power, as it leads to many of the evils in the world ;

5. Man is born to do his duty to his Creator ; he should therefore pay more attention to his duties than to his rights ;

6. Agriculture is the true occupation of man. It is therefore contrary to divine law to establish large cities, to employ hundreds of thousands for minding machines in factories so that a few can wallow in riches by exploiting the helplessness and poverty of the many."[101]

Gandhi had the penchant for extracting ideas of the great teachers which appealed to him most.

Gandhi's views on modern civilization and state (more particularly, his earlier views) resemble to a great extent the Tolstoyan ideas on the subjects. Romain Rolland observed : "The resemblance between the two men is greatest, or perhaps Tolstoy's influence has been strongest, in their condemnation

of European and Occidental civilization."[102] Prof. George Catlin writes : "Gandhi's reaction against "civilization", *scil* "Western civilization", it may be suspected, owes more to Tolstoy than to Edward Carpenter or J.J. Rousseau. Much in the impassioned Russian, the baron turned peasant or *moujik*, perfectly appealed to him."[103] Tolstoy's scathing denunciation of the institution of State* was reflected in Gandhi's characterization of the State as 'violence in a concentrated and organized form'. Gandhi's views on ascetic morality, sex purity and bread labour derives much of its inspiration from Tolstoy's writings.

A comparative study of these two great masters is not relevant to our present purpose. But a point is to be noted here in passing that however compelling the influence of Tolstoy might have been on Gandhi, he was not a throughgoing Tolstoyan. The mental make-up and the situational factors largely explain the differences between the two.[104] Tolstoy was anti-politics ; Gandhi, on the other hand, was intensely political. Gandhi was more down to the earth, he went to the grass roots, he had a keener sense of the practical affairs and was more responsive to the social needs. This trait of his character found its reflection in his philosophy. It was for the first time in recorded history that Gandhi gave a concrete shape to the law of love and suffering on a mass basis. And this formed a distinctive mark of his philosophy of action. Secondly, his conception of non-violence was not identical with that of Tolstoy in all aspects.[105] Gandhi's concept of non-violent resistance is different, to a certain extent, from Christian non-resistance to evil as propounded by Tolstoy. As life involves some amount of violence, Tolstoy turned away from it ; Gandhi on the other hand, followed the *Gītā* ideal of selfless action and participatsd in it eagerly.

*To Tolstoy, in his own language, "the words, a *Christian State* resemble the words *hot ice*. The thing is either is not a State using violence or it is not Christian."—Quoted by Milford Q. Sibley, 'The Political Theories of Modern Religious Pacifism' in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, June 1943, p. 447. Original Source : 'Church and State', Essays, Letters, Miscellanies in *Works*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1929, pt. I, p. 150.

From Tolstoy's book Gandhi came to know of the practical application of the principle of non-resistance by the Quakers and other Christian sects in America who strengthened Tolstoy's convictions. Gandhi, it may be presumed, was thus influenced by those American Christians, or at least he drew strength in his experiments in *satyāgraha* in South Africa from those accounts.

It has often been made out that Gandhi derived the idea of *sātyagraha* from Thoreau.* Gandhi denied this in a letter, dated September 10, 1935, addressed to Sri P. Kodananda Rao of the Servants of India Society. Gandhi wrote, "The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. But the movement was then known as passive resistance. As it was incomplete I had coined the word Satyagraha for the Gujarati readers. When I saw the title of Thoreau's great essay, I began to use his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even "Civil Disobedience" failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I therefore adopted the phrase Civil Resistance."[106]

* Referring to Gandhi's persistent attachment to Thoreau's essay on *Civil Disobedience*, Frederick B. Fisher writes : "A curious friendship, this, of ancient India for young America, still in its national swaddling clothes in the family of the ages ! Yet the Indian peaceful revolution has taken many of its weapons from the minds and lips of Americans. In a very real sense the seeds of Indian revolution were planted in America."—*That Strange Little Brown Gandhi*, Ray Long and Richard R. Smith Inc., New York, 1932.

In 1932 Haridas T. Muzumdar told his American readers quite definitively the "his (Thoreau's) teachings are today the mainspring of the Indian Non-violent Revolution." He continued : "Henry David Thoreau is known to the American people as the author of *Walden*. To Gandhi and India he is known primarily as the author of the immortal essay on *Civil Disobedience*. Yes, America, through Washington and Lincoln, and especially through Thoreau, may be held responsible for the motif of the present non-violent revolution in India. Gandhi is today giving back to America what he received from her by way of Thoreau. The American people can best show their esteem for Gandhi by enshrining Thoreau in their hearts."—*Gandhi Versus the Empire*, Foreword by Will Durant, Universal Publishing Co., New York, 1932. Incidentally, this book was banned from India by the then British Raj.

Nevertheless, Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience'* did influence Gandhi ; he called it a 'masterly treatise' ; 'it left a deep impression on me', he affirmed. Because of the availablility nowadays of the earlier writings of Gandhi (now being published in The *Collected Works*), it has become easier to find out the impact of Thoreau's ideas on Gandhi's mind. A closer study of the relationship between the ideas of Thoreau and that of Gandhi, as has been done by George Hendrick,[107] will impress anyone that the Thoreauvian imprint on Gandhi was quite marked. Gandhi himself acknowledged his indebtedness to Thoreau on many occasions. Gandhi in his 1942 appeal 'To American Friends', wrote : "You have given me a teacher in Thoreau, who furnished me through his essay on the 'Duty of Civil Disobedience' scientific confirmation of what I was doing in South Africa."[108] Similarly, Gandhi wrote to Franklin Roosevelt on July 1, 1942 : "I have profited greatly by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson."[109] Roger Baldwin, Chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union, travelled with Gandhi during a train trip through France in 1931 and noticed that the only book Gandhi was carrying with him was Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. Baldwin remarked on the extremeness of Thoreau's doctrine, and Gandhi replied that the essay "contained the essence of his political philosophy, not only as India's struggle related to the British, but as to his own views of the relation of citizens to government."[110]

At the Second Round Table Conference in London that same year, the American reporter Webb Miller, a long-time admirer of Thoreau, asked Gandhi, "Did you ever read an American named Henry D. Thoreau ?" Gandhi replied : "Why, of course I read Thoreau. I read *Walden* first in Johannesburg in South Africa in 1906 and his ideas influenced me greatly. I adopted some of them and recommended the study of Thoreau to all my

*Published in 1849 bearing the title 'Resistance to Civil Government' in *Aesthetic Papers, vide* Oscar Cargill's Introduction in *Henry D. Thoreau*, The Liberal Arts Press, New York, Forum Books, 1952, p. vii., xiii. It first took the form of a lecture called *The Rights and Duties of the Individual In Relation to Government* which Thoreau read before the Concord Lyceum. See William Condry, *Thoreau*, S. Chand & Co, Delhi Lucknow etc., p. 52.

friends who were helping me in the cause of Indian independence. ...There is no doubt that Thoreau's ideas greatly influenced my movement in India."[111]

Miller observed, "Gandhi received back from America what was fundamentally the philosophy of India after it had been distilled and crystallized in the mind of Thoreau."[112]*

Because of the hitherto general non-availability of materials, inaccuracies have crept in in determining the influence of Thoreau on Gandhi. The famous biographer of Thoreau, Henry Seidel Canby wrote in the *Yale Review* (March, 1931) that 'Civil Disobedience' came to Gandhi's attention while he was studying law in London in 1907. This statement is palpably inaccurate. Another writer notes that "Thoreau's idea..... attracted the attention of Mohandas Gandhi while he was a student at Cambridge."[113] These American scholars, it seems, in their eagerness to prove Thoreau's influence on Gandhi have ignored the facts, and hence the inaccuracies.

Henry S. Salt, one of Thoreau's earliest biographers, wrote to Gandhi, whom he had first met in London in the 1890s asking about the influence of Thoreau. Gandhi replied in a letter, which has often been reprinted, that 'Civil Disobedience' had 'left a deep impression' upon him and that he had "translated a portion for the readers of *Indian Opinion* in outh Africa which I was then editing, and I made copious extracts for the English part of the paper. The essay seemed to be so convincing and truthful that I felt the need of knowing more of Thoreau, and I came across your life of him, his *Walden*, and other essays, all of which I read with great pleasure and equal profit."[114]

A careful persual of the files of the *Indian Opinion*[115] would indicate how deep was this impression. He often referred to Thoreau and urged upon his followers to emulate

* Thoreau, a friend of Ralph Wardo Emerson, was himself influenced a good deal, like the latter, by the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*. "Beside the vast and cosmogonal philosophy of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*," wrote Thoreau, "even our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green and practical merely."—Quoted in William Condry, *Thoreau*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi Lucknow etc., 1962, p. 51.

the heroic example of the American non-conformist and philosophic rebel. The extracts published in the *Indian Opinion* presented in brief outline the main ideas of Thoreau's closely argued essay. "Its incisive logic is unanswerable", wrote Gandhi in the *Indian Opinion* dated 26 October, 1907.

A favourite essay both of Tolstoy's and of Gandhi's, *Civil Disobedience* pronounces the impressive statement denouncing government as an instrument of coercion and for the right of the individual to obey the dictates of his conscience rather than the dictate of the State. "The only obligation which I have the right to assume," Thoreau wrote, "is to do at any time what I think right." He felt it more honourable to be right than to be law-abiding. He was writing in 1849 in protest against slavery and the invasion of Mexico. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau wrote why he went to jail rather than pay a tax to the government which condoned human slavery. "There are thousands who are *in opinion* opposed to slavery and war," he declared, "who yet do nothing to put an end to them. There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to every virtuous man."

Thoreau believed in the abillty of the determined moral minority to correct the evils of the majority. He said : "I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name,—if ten *honest* men only—aye, if one *honest* man, in this state of Massachussets *ceasing to hold slaves* were actually to withdraw from this co-partnership and be locked up in the country gaol therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be, what is once done well is done for ever." Again, said he, "I have contemplated the imprisonment of the offender rather than the seizure of his goods—though both will serve the same purpose, because they who assert the purest right and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property."*

* Gandhi incorporated this piece of Thoreau's writing in *Young India*, 7.7.20, 'Pure Civil Disobedience'. See *Young India* 1919-22, S. Ganesan, Madras, 1922, p. 931.

There can be no doubt about the appeal of Thoreau's essay which Gandhi read at a critical phase of his life in South Africa. From all available evidence, it seems, that Thoreau's writings were known to Gandhi during the formative period of the first *satyāgraha* movement. "From Thoreau and Ruskin", he wrote, "I could find out arguments in favour of our fight."[116]

Thoreau's essay not only propounded civil disobedience, which constitutes one important stratagem in *satyāgraha*, but also pointed out the potentiality of non-co-operation which Gandhi enlarged upon as a social technique of action combined with his emphasis on the non-violent character it.*

Thoreau's influence upon Gandhi, F. I. Carpenter writes, "may partly be credited to Emerson's teaching, even if indirectly."[117] Although Thoreau's influence upon Gandhi was far greater, Emerson directly influenced the Mahatma. Gandhi was acquainted with Emerson as early as 1903.[118]

In a letter to his son Manilal, dated March 25, 1909, Gandhi wrote: "Now I have read a great deal in the prison (Gandhi's second imprisonment). I have been reading Emerson, Ruskin and Mazzini. I have also been reading the *Upanishads*. All confirm the view that education does not mean a knowledge of letters but it means character building, it means a knowledge of duty. ...Please tell Maganlalbhai that I would advise him to read Emerson's essays. These essays are worth studying. He should read them; mark the important passages and then finally copy them out in a note book. The essays to my mind contain the teaching of Indian wisdom in a western guru...."[119] Emerson continued to be his favourite reading also during his third term of imprisonment,[120] as also afterwards in India. In his preface to *Indian Home Rule*, we find Emerson to be one of those masters whom "he endeavoured firmly to follow."[121] Gandhi's

* "Thoreau was not perhaps an out-and-out champion of non-violence." —M. K. Gandhi in *Young India*, 23.3.21 in *Young India* 1919-22, S. Ganesan, Madras, 1922, p. 222.

Thoreau's three speeches on John Brown (1859-60) extol the insurrectionary attempt at Harper's Ferry.—See Max Lerner's article on Thoreau in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Ed-in-chief: Edwin R. A. Seligman, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1957, Vol. 14, p. 622.

association with the Emerson Club in South Africa[122] also suggests that he must have felt great admiration for the American thinker. In 1914, Gandhi became a member of the London Emerson Club.[123]

A man of action that he was, Gandhi, inspite of his being an admirer of Emerson, could not appreciate the 'inactive intellectual' aspect of the American thinker. He told Dr. Crane, an American clergyman in 1937 : "It is enough that my non-violence is independent of the sanction of scriptures. But the fact remains that religious books have a hold upon mankind which the other books have not. They have made a greater impression on me than Mark Twain or, to take a more appropriate instance, Emerson. Emerson was a thinker. Mahomed and Jesus were through and through men of action in a sense Emerson would never be."[124]*.

Gandhi regarded Socrates as 'a great Satyagrahi'[125]** and published the 'Story of a Soldier of truth',[126] serially in the columns of the *Indian Opinion*. In another serialised article on 'Sarvodaya', Gandhi wrote : "Socrates gave us some idea of man's duty. He practised his precepts. It can be argued that Ruskin's ideas are an elaboration of Socrates's."[127] Whether this appraisal is correct or not demands a closer scrutiny, but this expresses Gandhi's regard for the Greek martyr-philosopher. He read Socrates during his first term of imprisonment in 1908,[128] but even before that he must have had some knowledge of Socrates' heroic character. In another serial article on 'Ethical Religion' in the *Indian Opinion* (26.1.1907), he referred

* Emerson's chief importance is as a thinker. He was a great ethical critic of society. The lines like : "Go put your creed into your deed / Nor speak with double tongue" or "The greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it" speak of his ethical individualism. Max Lerner correctly notes : "throughout his thinking one feels that his world was not a society but a collection of individuals. He did not offer, nor did he envisage the need of, any mechanisms whereby individual judgments would add upto a social judgment or individual creativeness be translated into social action."—*Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Ed-in-Chief : Edwin R. A. Seligman, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1957, Vol. 5, p. 488.

** "Neither if we ought never to do wrong at all, ought repay wrong with wrong as the world thinks we may ?"

"Then we ought not to repay wrong with wrong or do harm to anyone, no matter what we may have suffered from him."—Socrates to Crito.

to Socrates.[129] The extent and the nature of Socrates' influence on Gandhi is debatable.[130] But there can be no doubt that Gandhi's admiration for Socrates was explicit and unreserved. He, it seems, understood Socrates in his own way and found in him an embodiment of soul force against state injustice.

The outline-review given above of the Western influence on Gandhi shows that he was a great absorber of ideas. But it was not as an absorber that he distinguished himself. He absorbed ideas, whatever be the source—indigenous or foreign—and translated them into action, which in its turn attracted the notice of the people both within and across the geographical frontiers of India. Prof. George Catlin aptly remarks : "...if not in the conduct of his life, yet in the tone of his ideas, (Gandhi) is deeply under Western influence ; he is as much broker of thought of the West to the East as of the East to the West."[131] This will be further evident if we care to find out the impact of the Western culture on Gandhi.

Impact of Western culture

Prof. Toynbee in his monumental study writes : "In this spiritual travail of a Gandhi and a Lenin in our generation, we can watch the impact of the Western civilization upon Hinduism and upon Russian orthodox Christendom in the act of transformation from an external encounter between the Western Society and its neighbours into an inner experience of a Westernized world. Strive as they will to win a decisive victory for an anti-Western reaction, the Hindu and the Russian zealot of these latter days can only succeed in giving an impetus to the very process of Westernization against which they are up in arms. The life and energy with which they inspire their anti-Western 'holy wars' is actually drawn—and this is the secret of its vigour—from a Western source ; and thus in the crucible of these ardent souls, an anti-Western movement is transmuted into a new manifestation of the spiritual force against which it is directed. A Gandhi and a Lenin find it impossible to take spiritual action without being moved by the spirit of Western civilization...It is as though this Western spirit were a kind

of psychic electricity which had now electrified the whole of Mankind with such effect that there could no longer be any exertion of human psychic force which was not either a positive or a negative charge of this all-pervasive Western current."[132] This statement by the world's greatest living historian is more than explicit and no further elaboration seems to be necessary. A few points may, however, be touched upon.

Gandhi's stay in England was rewarding in more than one sense. It was not merely that during this stay he discovered India through *Song Celestial* and *Light of Asia*, or that he only experienced spiritual illumination through his reading of Sermon on the Mount, or, again that his love for vegetarianism grew to the exclusion of other things ; he learnt something more too. He encountered England at a period when she was pulsating with the message of individual freedom and democracy. He faced a country where medieval sluggishness had no place, and all emphasis was being laid upon individual character and conduct. He found a people vibrant with energy. He was delighted to find the civic awareness of the English people. Years later, he told Dr. Clemens : "From my observation of the West, and particularly of your own country, I have learned two outstanding facts : First, cleanliness ; second, energy. I am fully convinced that my people cannot advance spiritually, until they clean up. Your people are wonderfully energetic. To a large extent, it has been energy after things material. If Indian people could have that same amount of energy, rightly directed, they would receive a great blessing."[133] This appreciation of the quality of energy of the English people is significant. As is well known, it was Gandhi who instilled energy into the languid condition of India. The message of energy that Gandhi brought forth created a new lever of action which was to shape India's destiny.

His philosophy is indeed a philosophy of action. However much the *Gītā* might have influenced this philosophy, the Western source is no less responsible for the dynamic element that his teaching contains.

Gandhi spent his student days in England when that country was going through a period of intellectual awakening. New ideas were springing up and new values were being created and preached. That was the heyday of liberalism. Gandhi's young mind was not impervious to these influences. The individualistic-liberalist tradition marked its imprint on his mind. As Louis Fischer says : "Ideologically, Gandhi stood with one foot in the deep individualistic current of the first half of Europe's nineteenth century and the other in the turbulent nationalistic current of the second half of that century ; the two streams merged in him and he endeavoured to achieve the same synthesis in the Indian independence movement."[134] Will Durant has observed : "Those years in London taught him three subversive ideas : nationalism, democracy and Christianity."[135]

But with his experience growing, the charm for English liberal democracy started withering away. Gandhi, once an admirer of "England, the land of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilization"[136] turned out to be one of its staunchest critics. His revulsion for modern civilization found its expression afterwards in the pages of *Hind Swaraj*. He lived in England during the period when the romantic reaction against industrial civilization, represented by men like Ruskin and William Morris, was most vocal. It is rather unfortunate that he saw growing industrial civilization, accompanied inevitably but painfully with the inhuman exploitation and de-personalization, at its worst, first in England (1888-1889), then in South Africa (1894-1914), and finally in India (1915 onwards). These experiences deeply affected his views on modern civilization. He wanted to move away from the West ; but the early impressions did not leave him altogether. His doctrines ostensibly directed against the vulgar materialism of the West promoted, however ironically, the process of modernization, as has been observed by Toynbee. Gandhi promoted a political movement with a Western programme—the transformation of India into a sovereign independent parliamentary state and with a Western procedure (i.e. the whole Western

political apparatus of conferences, resolutions, votes, platforms, newspapers and publicity).[137] Although Gandhi had his own concepts and ideals that differed from Western notions, yet as one who had to move within the limits imposed upon by history, he led the nation for the establishment of a free and democratic state and adopted the appropriate methods that came from the West. Nobody can tear himself away from history. And Gandhi was no exception to this general law. He rose to greatness only by moving with and within history.

Some critics,[138] in most cases emotionally prejudiced and inadequately informed, allege that Gandhi's philosophy represents orthodox nationalism and obscurantism. We submit that this charge stands farthest removed from truth. And one need not subscribe to Gandhian views in all its aspects to admit this. We would like to cite the observation of Albert Schweitzer who himself is as original as Gandhi was. He writes : "Never before has any Indian taken so much interest in concrete realities as has Gandhi. Others were for the most part contented to demand a charitable attitude to the poor. But he—and in this his thought is just like that of a Modern European—wants to change the economic conditions that are at the root of poverty."[139] It is this essential 'Modern European' element of corporate activity with its aim at changing the course of the given reality that marked off him from other orthodox nationalist leaders and distinguished his philosophy of action from the traditional way of thinking. Gandhi, as we have observed earlier, was rooted in tradition and had at once outstepped its bounds. Therein lay the originality of Gandhi.

South Africa : the laboratory of his experiments

With Gandhi, to believe was to act. The ideas that seized his mind found their concrete expression in the field of action. A proper appreciation of Gandhi's philosophy can only be made in the background of the epic struggles he led in South Africa and then, afterwards, in India. But because of obvious limitations these accounts of heroism and selfless dedication to a cause cannot be recounted here. One may

only profitably refer to the pages of his *Autobiography* and *Satyagraha in South Africa* which happen to be the best commentaries on the origin and development of his ideas and early experiments. A few points may, however, be jotted down here to maintain the thread of continuity.

It was in South Africa that his religious consciousness reached a mature level and took a definite turn ; it was there that he read the works of the Western thinkers who influenced him in varying degrees. And there again he put into practice what he assimilated from the Eastern and Western sources. A new technique of action—*satyāgraha* as it was to be called later on—was thus born in the soil of South Africa.

Gandhi confronted horrendous White racialism in South Africa. Violence, conquest and exploitation marked this race domination. He faced White bullies and experienced personal sufferings which shook his very being. A man of sensitive feeling and a keen sense of duty, Gandhi deemed it advisable not to flee away leaving his countrymen at the mercy of the White racialists, but to stay there to share the sufferings of his people and fight the humilation that had been taken for an irredeemable lot of the non-Whites. Discriminative legislations were proposed by the White rulers to debar Indians from their rights of citizenship and other privileges. These circumstances provided Gandhi with the opportunity of offering resistance to the 'black act', through the novel technique of non-violent action. The new weapon thus forged in his encounter with the racialists in the soil of South Africa, was chiselled and sharpened further and further in various *satyāgraha* movements that he conducted later on in his homeland.

South Africa made him a new man. The shy, timid, introvert Mohandas was transformed into an extrovert and dynamic personality rare to be equalled. He at last found his *metier* in action. He found his purpose in life.

The characteristics that marked his life afterwards—self-transcending service, and sense of loyalty and responsibility to the community—found their first expression in South Africa.

It was in South Africa again that his indoctrination in nationalism was confirmed. His success in the early experiments also confirmed his belief in the conquest of evil by love.

Another point needs to be examined here. A critic professing himself to be a Marxist[140] has alleged that Gandhi's *satyāgraha* movement in South Africa was "started and carried on solely with the purpose of safeguarding the interests of the (Indian) traders." The Gandhian *satyāgraha*, it has been alleged, was not primarily concerned with the indentured labourers ; their support was mobilised only in order to enhance the strength of the movement, and so on. This we hold to be an erroneous 'Marxist' interpretation of the South African problem in the period under review. Such an interpretation betrays a subjective prejudice and does not lay much store upon an objective assessment. As a matter of fact, the Indians—irrespective of their class situations—were subjected to insults and humiliations and were deprived of the elementary human rights. True, the merchants had their own axe to grind, but they also suffered. The participation of the Indian merchants in this movement did not by itself make it a movement of and for the merchants. The movement in South Africa was a multi-class movement as it could only have been at that time. The very compulsion of reality made this movement multi-class in content and character ; class question obviously remained in the background. Fighting the arrogant White supremacy was the historic task that confronted Gandhi and his fellow-countrymen in South Africa. Marxism teaches that history should be viewed in concrete background and tasks formulated accordingly. Ideologically viewed, the content of the movement was nationalistic in a sense. It is only in profound sociological sense that the said movement was bourgeois in character as nationalist movements have always been. But this should not be stretched too far to advance the thesis that the working class should avoid these movements. Any discerning student of Gandhi's life and philosophy knows that in this multi-class movement his bias remained on the side of the downtrodden and the suffering

people. It is relevant here to record that it was in *Hind Swaraj*, written during his South Africa days, that Gandhi first declared that power should vest with the 'working classes', though the term was used in a broad sense to mean the toiling people as a whole. What is more important, in our opinion, is not to look about for 'the capitalist agent' in Gandhi but to note how this experience of multi-class movement impressed Gandhi in his further elaboration of the theory and practice of *satyāgraha*.

Impact of socio-economic conditions

Gandhi's philosophy does not contain copy-book maxims ; it is grounded upon his experiences. An essential humanist that he was, Gandhi was appalled at the ugly and grim sight of poverty that crushed India in his days. He saw poverty in all its nakedness. The sight of poverty that he had encountered in Orissa and other parts of India left its deep imprint upon his mind. He wrote in 1924 : "The life was ebbing away in them. They were living pictures of despair. You could count every rib. You could see every artery. There was no muscle, no flesh. Parched, crumpled skin and bone was all you could see. There was no lustre in their eyes. They seemed to want to die. They had no interest in anything save the handful of rice they got. They could not work for money. For love, perhaps : It almost seemed that they would condescend to eat and live if you would give them the handful of rice. It is the greatest tragedy I know of these men and women, our brothers and sisters, dying a slow torturing death. Theirs is an eternal compulsory fast. And as they break it occasionally with rice, they seem to mock us for the life we live."[141]

Three years earlier, in his famous article 'The Great Sentinel', he expressed his anguish in an incomparable language : "The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance. It is an indescribably painful state which has got to be experienced to be realized. I have found it impossible

to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem—invigorating food."

Speaking to the Labour M.P.s after the Round Table Conference of 1931, he drew the attention of the British authorities to the deplorably low income levels and the magnitude of disparity in income distribution in India. "...your Prime Minister does not draw more than fifty times the average per capita income, whereas in India the Viceroy gets something like five thousand times the average income of an Indian. And if the average income is so low, you can understand that the actual income in a vast number of cases must be nil".[142]

"I am pained", he told the audience at Lancashire on September 22, 1931, "at the unemployment here. But here is no starvation or semi-starvation. In India we have both. If you went to the villages, you would find utter despair in the eyes of the villagers, you would find half-skeletons, living corpses. If India could revive them by putting life and food into them in the shape of work, India would help the world. Today India is a curse. You have three millions unemployed, but we have three hundred million unemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is seventy shillings. Our average income is only seven shillings and six pence a month."[143]

The following estimates of annual per capita national income during the period 1868-1937-38[144] justify Gandhi's statement.

Estimates of Per Capita National Income

Estimated by—	Official or Unofficial	Year when made	Relating to year	Annual Income per head Rs.	Sh.
D. Naoroji ...	Unofficial	1876	1868	20	20
Baring and Barbour ...	Official	1882	1881	27	45
Lord Curzon ...	Official	1901	1897-98	30	40
W. Digby ...	Unofficial	1902	1899	18	24
Findlay Shirras ...	Official	1924	1911	49	65
Wadia and Joshi ...	Unofficial	1925	1913-14	44½	59

Estimated by—	Official or Unofficial	Year when made	Relating to year	Annual Income per head Rs.	Sh.
Shah and Khambata	Unofficial	1924	1921-22	74	95
Simon Report ...	Official	1930	1921-22	116	155
V. K. R. V. Rao ...	Unofficial	1939	1925-99	78	117
Central Banking Enquiry Committee (agricultural population only) ...	Official	1931	1928	42	63
Findlay Shirras ...	Official	1932	1931	63	94½
Sir James Grigg ...	Official	1938	1937-38	56	84
V. K. R. V. Rao ...	Unofficial	1940	1931-32	62	93

The official Simon Commission's report gave the "most optimistic" estimate of the average Indian's income as amounting to 5d. a day in 1921-22. Even this was reduced to two and a half pence in the nineteen-thirties because of a further fall in agricultural prices.[145] This, however, was only the gross average income, not the actual income of the overwhelming majority. From these figures, after deducting the heavy 'home charges' and 'tribute of imperialism' (interest on debt, dividends on British capital investments, banking of financial commissions, etc.), the average income of this period could well be estimated at two and a quarter pence.[146]

The extreme inequality of income covered in the average is a very important point that must be taken note of. Prof. K. T. Shah and K. J. Khambata in their *Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India* (1924) showed that 1 per cent of the population gets one-third of the national income, while 60 per cent of the population get 30 per cent of it. This means that for the 60 per cent or majority of the population any gross figure of the average national income per head must be exactly halved so as to correctly represent what they actually get.[147]

According to Shah and Khambata, the average income was "just enough either to feed two men in every three of the population, or give them all two in place of every three meals they need, on condition that they all consent to go naked,

live out of doors all the year round, have no amusement or recreation, and want nothing else but food, and that the lowest, the coarsest, the least nutritious."[148]

A comparative estimate of average annual per capita income with the USA (in the U.S.A. the national income in the same period was about Rupees 2000 i.e. about forty times that of India) and Great Britain (the per capita national income of Great Britain was over twenty five times that of India) would reveal how low was the level of India's income. According to Wadia and Joshi, during the period between 1895 and 1914, the condition of the Indian population did not show any marked improvement.[149]

The official and unofficial estimates and evidence recorded before the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India (1926) and the Royal Commission on Labour in India (1929), speak of the terrible condition of the vast majority of the population. The colonial rule that drained the national wealth of India and plundered its resources was chiefly responsible for this extreme poverty of the Indian people.

The resultant reaction was sure to manifest itself on political movement aiming at an end to this situation. Vera Anstey comments : "It is not surprising that a great agitation arose against British rule on the score of its economic results. The various classes of educated Indians, much as they disagreed amongst themselves, tended to write in hostile criticism of the policy or lack of policy of the Government of India."[150]

Gandhi's opposition to imperialism was grounded in his firm and determined resolve to put an end to this state of affairs. His economic philosophy was primarily aimed at doing away with iniquitous distribution of income and establishment of social and economic justice. He was also not indifferent to the tyranny of the Indian princes and his indictment against the native rulers was recorded as early as 1909 in the pages of *Hind Swaraj*. He branded the princes in 1931 as "British officers in Indian dress."[151] Gandhi also attacked the indolent habit of the people and urged upon them to take to the spinning wheel which, he believed, would alleviate the economic sufferings

of the people and impart a new sense of dignity and self-reliance.

The social life presented no fairer picture than the economic one. For centuries, untouchability hallowed with tradition and sanctified by religion, persisted in the Hindu society with all its monstrosity. Women were given an inferior status and the vast majority of the population were steeped in ignorance and illiteracy.

Gandhi faced a materially pauper and morally degenerate India and he took upon himself the stupendous task of changing the course of India's history. Gandhi's socio-economic philosophy embodies this urge.

Political background

Gandhi's political philosophy was evolved in the course of struggles against White racialism in South Africa and then against British imperialism in India and as such it bears the impress of these movements. A study of these movements is imperative for a proper evaluation of Gandhian politics. But however necessary that may be, it is beyond the scope of the present study. Still a few points ought to be touched upon.

The nationalist movement in India, prior to Gandhi's advent, flowed in two streams—the constitutionalist agitation or 'the politics of mendicancy' on the one side and the underground revolutionary movement, popularly known as terrorism on the other. While the former was limited to the educated upper middle classes, the latter drew its ranks from the middle and lower-middle classes. While these movements had their own parts to play in the task of national regeneration and political freedom, these could not encompass the bulk of the population of the country. There was no 'serious politics' in the sense Lenin used the term. The Russian revolutionary wrote : "politics begin where the masses are ; not where there are thousands, but millions, that is where serious politics begin."[152] It is in this sense that Gandhi introduced 'serious politics' in this country and transformed the movement, hitherto confined to the educated classes, to an authentic broad-based mass movement.

The historic task that confronted Gandhi's India was to strive for the complete liquidation of foreign imperialist domination and colonial economic exploitation. In other words, national liberation and democratic transformation of the society were the immediate demands that awaited fulfilment. The feudal elements and the top-knotch section of the Indian bourgeoisie who where dependent upon the British for their own existence and gains, naturally kept themselves aloof from the national liberation struggle. The major section of the native bourgeoisie, because of inherent historic development, found its place in the nationalist movement and thus played an oppositional reformist role in relation to foreign imperialism. The lower-middle class intelligentsia formed the radical section of this movement, while the majority of the population—the toiling people in the fields and factories—were yet to emerge as an independent force to be reckoned with. This had been the position till 1927-28. The Indian nationalist movement, in short, was a multi-class movement and the national question remained in the front. Gandhi's politics was inevitably attuned to the character of this movement. But that does not describe the whole situation. As subsequent discussion will show, his politics was primarily concerned with raising the masses from their submerged condition and investing them with political authority to determine their own destiny. Here he struck a completely new note in Indian politics. For the realization of this goal he adopted methods such as would best help in the growth of consciousness of the people and inspire them with a zeal to remould their lives.

We shall discuss later on (see ch. 9 below) about the conditions that favoured the adoption of the non-violent weapon. For the present, we would let Gandhi speak as to why he preferred the non-violent technique. In a letter to the Viceroy, dated 1 August, 1920, and addressed by way of inaugurating the Non-co-operation Movement, he wrote: "In my humble opinion the ordinary method of agitating by way of petitions, deputations and the like is no remedy for moving to repentance a Government so hopelessly

indifferent to the welfare of its charge as the Government of India has proved to be. In European countries, condonation of such grievous wrongs as the Khilafat and the Punjab would have resulted in a bloody revolution by the people. They would have resisted at all cost national emasculation such as the said wrongs imply. But half of India is too weak to offer violent resistance and the other half is unwilling to do so. I have therefore ventured to suggest the remedy of Non-co-operation which enables those who wish, to dissociate themselves from the Government and which, if it is unattended by violence and undertaken in an ordered manner, must compel it to retrace its steps and undo the wrongs committed.'[153]